

58
Jerram (11)

*The Christian Ministry exemplified in
Saint Paul:*

A SERMON.

W. Farish



*The Christian Ministry exemplified in
Saint Paul:*



45 (11)

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH

OF

Boston,

AT THE VISITATION

OF THE

Reverend JOHN PRETYMAN, D.D.

ARCHDEACON OF LINCOLN,

MAY 7, 1800.

By CHARLES JERRAM, A.M.



JUSTUM ET TENACEM PROPOSITI VIRUM
NON CIVIUM ARDOR PRAVA JUBENTUM,
NON VULTUS INSTANTIS TYRANNI
MENTE QUATIT SOLIDA.

HOR.



Wisbech:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY JOHN WHITE.

SOLD ALSO BY RIVINGTONS, LONDON; DEIGHTON,
CAMBRIDGE; BURBAGE, NOTTINGHAM; AND
HELLABY, BOSTON.



(PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.)



ERRATA.

PREFACE.—Page 1, line 7. for terminate, read *terminated*.

Page 6, line 5, for means, read *mean*.

SERMON.—Page 13, line 21, for purchase, read *purify*.

THE PREFACE.

THE advantages resulting to christianity, as a system of divine truth, from the various attempts to subvert it, are not easily calculated. Every renewed attack has called forth the energies of men, "valiant for the truth," and terminated in the confusion of the assailant.

The defeat of our enemies, however, is not the only ground of triumph:—the sincere christian has been inspired with redoubled confidence, and "built up in his most holy faith;"—and the establishment of the believer is of greater importance, than the discomfiture of an
an

an host of enemies. Having so often seen the fortress, within which his dearest hopes are deposited, withstand the most formidable combinations of deep-rooted hatred, subtle policy and unwearied activity, the christian justly deems it impregnable; and believes, that “the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it.”

If infidelity were not equally inveterate in its enmity and fruitful in its resources, we might fairly presume that it would never wield another weapon against the cause of reason and revelation. So completely has this enemy been beaten, in every quarter, even when aided by its most powerful allies—licentiousness, ridicule and blasphemy, that invention must be strangely tortured indeed, to find another plausible ground for renewing the attack.

In

In this moment of decided superiority, the author of the following Discourse feels an ardent desire to extend the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. He does not think it sufficient to have raised an impregnable fortification round the truths of divine Revelation—he wishes to see what effects they are capable of producing, when used as *offensive* weapons against “the principalities and powers of darkness.” We have already witnessed the inefficacy of every dart directed against “the shield of faith;”—perhaps “the sword of the spirit” may become equally illustrious in the complete destruction of this irreconcilable enemy. At least, the experiment is worth making. It has, in former times, wrought wonders; and why may it not repeat them? “The arms of our warfare, though not carnal,”

carnal," *have* been "mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds," and there is no reason to suppose that their virtues are diminished:—rather we may believe, that half their strength has not yet been tried. "The little stone, cut out without hands, we are told, became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." It is upon record, that every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord;" and that "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ." These promises are sufficient to inspire hope, and excite exertion.

The present state of things does not, it is true, seem to portend the speedy approach of these happy days. "Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people:"—but still,
this

this is no proof that "the sun of righteousness" may not soon arise "with healing on his wings." Those who have diligently attended to "the signs of the times," think they discover, through the thick gloom which has, for a long time, darkened our hemisphere, indications of a brighter day. May their hopes be more than realized! The diffusion of christianity, however, depends, in a great measure, on the exertions of the ministers of religion: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;—and how can they hear, without a preacher?"

Under this impression, and influenced by a sincere desire to see the prevalence of "pure and undefiled religion," the author hopes to obtain the candour of the public, for obtruding upon them the following

lowing discourse. He is sensible of its want of sufficient merit, to ensure it any extensive attention: His highest ambition will be gratified, if it should be the means of exciting the least of his brethren to greater exertions in so good a cause. He has, indeed, delivered his sentiments, with plainness and fidelity, on what he conceives to be the genuine doctrines of christianity, and the duty of the christian minister:—but far be it from him to assume the Censor's chair, and sit in judgement on either the zeal or the doctrines of his brethren. Deeply conscious of his own defects and feeble efforts in the exercise of his function, he has rather brought forward what he thought might awaken animation in himself, and recal to his own mind the great objects of his ministry, than

than intended to prescribe or dictate to others.

If, however, his views on the subjects, discussed in the following pages, will bear a rational investigation; and should be found to concur with divine revelation—the only standard of religious truth—he hopes they may not be unprofitably offered to the public. Truth of all kinds is of importance; but in a matter so momentous as religion, in which the eternal destinies of man are involved, its value is incalculable. This consideration, it is hoped, will excuse the author for venturing to give his opinion on some subjects in which all are not agreed. If what he has advanced be the truth, and should carry conviction to any that before thought differently, the benefit may be

be great. The name of every christian minister may be called "Legion:" Every part of his conduct, and every sentiment he adopts, has an influence, perhaps not very remote, on society at large;—and when his zeal is in proportion to the purity of his doctrines, the blessings he may diffuse cannot easily be appreciated. That the following pages may add, though in ever so small a degree, to the sum of human happiness, is the sincere prayer of

THE AUTHOR.

Long-Sutton, July 25, 1800.

A SERMON.

2 GP
A SERMON,

&c.

Acts, Chap. xx. Verse 24.

BUT NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME, NEITHER
COUNT I MY LIFE DEAR UNTO MYSELF, SO THAT
I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE WITH JOY, AND THE
MINISTRY WHICH I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE
LORD JESUS, TO TESTIFY THE GOSPEL OF
THE GRACE OF GOD.

AT the birth of our Lord, angels pro-
claimed, "peace on earth and good
will toward men;" and yet it must
be acknowledged that christianity has,
eventually, been productive of much
confusion and discord.

This fact, however, neither militates
against the truth, nor detracts from the
excellence

excellence of our religion. The genius of christianity may, notwithstanding, be friendly to universal peace and harmony, and the failure be solely attributable to the unreasonable prejudices and sinful passions of mankind. It is confessed that no principles are less accommodating than those which Christ inculcated:—they neither bend to the caprice of fashion, nor flatter the fastidious ear of pride and dissipation; but they may not, on this account, be less adapted to the ends they profess to have in view. If there be any propriety in the question of St. James, “ Whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” it cannot be reasonably objected against the principles of the gospel, that they are hostile to the dominion of the irregular passions: perhaps, on the contrary, this circumstance evinces their superior wisdom and excellence. By refusing to unite themselves with what would counteract their genuine influence, they seem

seem to promise, wherever they prevail, a peace both solid in its basis, and permanent in its duration.

It was, however, to be expected that a religion, which wages eternal hostility against every vicious propensity—instead of obtaining a cordial reception—would have to combat many difficulties, and much opposition. Hence our Lord foretold his disciples, that “in the world they should have tribulation,” that they should “be brought before rulers and kings,” on account of their doctrines, and that they should “be hated of all men, for his sake.” The event fully justified the prediction. They were conformed to the sufferings of their master: they had “trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments;—they were stoned, were tempted, were slain with the sword:—they wandered about, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” So invariably had St. Paul met with violent

B 2

opposition

opposition and persecutions, that he considered them as inseparably connected with the faithful discharge of his apostolic office. At the conclusion of his last conversation with the elders of Ephesus, he says, "Behold! I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me." Yet, not intimidated by these difficulties, nor dismayed by a prospect of death, in all its dreadful forms, he triumphantly adds, "but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

It may not be uninteresting, on this occasion, to consider, The view which St. Paul had of his office, as a minister of Jesus Christ; and The prospects which supported
and

and animated him, under the difficulties to which the duties of that office exposed him.

With respect to the *authority* by which the apostle exercised his ministry, it is evident that he considered it as immediately derived "from the Lord Jesus." In his epistles, he calls himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ;" and more than once informs us, that he received not his appointment from man.

Hence, some are of an opinion, that the christian ministry is perfectly independent on human authority; and that every christian, who conceives himself possessed of suitable qualifications, is duly authorised to perform the duties of that sacred function.

But this opinion, it is presumed, receives no countenance from what either St. Paul, or any other inspired writer has said on
this

this subject; and seems, moreover, to be subversive of all order and decorum; and, consequently, is directly opposite to the spirit of christianity.

It is not intended to discuss the much disputed question, "What may be considered as a legitimate qualification for the exercise of the ministerial function?" yet we cannot help observing, that those must have thought very superficially indeed, and read the scriptures with very little attention, who pretend that no human authority is necessary to sanction the preaching of the everlasting gospel. If the argument from analogy may, in any instance, be admitted, it applies, in the present case, with peculiar force. Can it be supposed that that God who has created the world in such admirable order, and governs it by such exact, and almost invariable laws, would leave the exercise of the most sacred and important function to uncertain impulses, or the caprice of ignorant

ignorant, or conceited men? Is it conceivable that infinite wisdom would arrange a plan for human redemption, and leave no certain regulations for reducing that plan into effect? Surely this cannot be supposed. We may be confident that, some where or other, if not by direct precept, yet by evident implication, or uniform example, sufficient direction may be collected from the sacred writings to prevent disorder and confusion in the church of God. And indeed, much information, on this point, has been left us. From the extreme caution of the apostles in ordaining pastors and elders, as well as from the directions given, especially to Timothy, we may perceive that no one has a right to exercise the office of the ministry, who has not been regularly appointed thereto by human authority. The argument against this position, founded upon the apostles receiving their commission immediately from Christ, is not in point. They were contemporary with him, and
could

could receive their authority in no other way. The question is, did those who *succeeded* the apostles, and lived directly *after* the time of Christ, perform the duties of the ministry at their own discretion? or did they receive their commission at the hands of others? This question requires but little consideration. Uniform example*, and positive precept†, declare that the latter was the case.

It is not, however, asserted that human authority is *alone* a sufficient qualification for the ministry. The *credentials* of this appointment must come from God:—and these, perhaps, consist chiefly in a mind “renewed in holiness;” a clear conception of the fundamental doctrines of christianity, and a sincere desire to promote the eternal salvation of man. Where these are not possessed, the interests of christianity will be betrayed, and those ends counteracted

* Acts vi. 6.—xiii. 2, 3. 1 Tim. iv. 14.

† 1 Tim. v. 22. 2 Tim. ii. 2. Tit. i. 5.

which

which the ministry of the gospel is intended to promote. But still, it seems to be the appointment of heaven, that these credentials should receive the sanction of man: and that no pretensions whatever to superior qualifications should supersede a regular, human ordination. This order the Holy Spirit expressly prescribed, when Barnabas and Saul were designated to the office of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. "The Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when *they* had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts xiii. 2, 3.). While, therefore, it is remembered that, unless the Lord of the vineyard himself appoint the labourers, whoever engage in his service, will be deemed officious intruders; it ought not to be forgotten, that none are appointed by him, who submit not to the prudential regulations prescribed in his word.

An office, which has God for its author, and the solemn appointment of man for its sanction, may well be supposed to have objects of the greatest importance to accomplish. St. Paul enumerates them in a few, but comprehensive words. The *end* for which he received his ministry "of the Lord Jesus," was "to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Perhaps nothing more strongly characterizes the religion of Christ, than the views it exhibits of human nature. While philosophy considers man in the vast capacity and powers of his mind, and ranks him high in the scale of intellectual existence; christianity considers him as a moral agent, and represents him as a creature fallen, depraved, and ruined. If there be a feature in the sacred scriptures more prominent than another, it seems to be that which expresses the sinful and degraded state of man. It is in the wretchedness of the human race, that mercy takes
its

its origin;—it is this which throws the greatest lustre on the love of God;—it is in this that we have the brightest display of the compassion of the Redeemer: “Herein does God commend his love to us, in that while we were sinners Christ died for the ungodly.” Probably no one had a deeper insight into human depravity than St. Paul; and hence we may, in some measure, account for the exalted language in which he speaks of “the grace of God.” He represents the whole world as “dead in trespasses and sins,” and then adds, “by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” It should seem, from the writings of this inspired apostle, that no one rightly understands the gospel of Christ, who does not admit that salvation is entirely “through grace.” Hence he emphatically calls it, “the gospel of the grace of God.”

In the context, we are informed of the points on which St. Paul chiefly insisted,

to audiences of every description. He “ testified both to Jews and Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” And in this, it is presumed, he acted with peculiar propriety. Considering man as a creature fallen from God, from holiness, and his allegiance to the Universal Governor—and this is the state of greeks and barbarians, bond and free—what subject could be more appropriate than the doctrine of *repentance*? Should he be so happy as to promote this, he knew that the love of holiness would succeed the practice of sin, and a conscientious regard to the law of God, *because it is divine*, would take place of that natural enmity to the Supreme Being, which is, at once, the sin and the disgrace of those in whom it exists.

With regard to *faith*—it was a doctrine also peculiarly adapted to the state of the redeemed. What could be more reasonable than that a creature, convinced of his degeneracy

degeneracy, should cordially acquiesce in the method which God has prescribed of reconciling sinners to himself?—What more natural, than that he should embrace the salvation purchased by Jesus Christ, and accept of the Redeemer, as his divine Prophet, his atoning Priest, and his righteous King?—what more proper, than that he should rely on Christ alone, and on “the abundant grace of God,” through him, “for righteousness, justification, and salvation?” The doctrines, then, of faith and repentance seem to be a summary of “the gospel of the grace of God,” and the substance of the apostle’s preaching.

May we be permitted to exhibit his conduct, as worthy the imitation of every christian minister? It is acknowledged that the absolute necessity of *moral duties* cannot be too earnestly insisted upon. “To purchase a people zealous for good works,” entered essentially into the purposes of our blessed Lord, in undertaking human redemption.

demption. There cannot, then, be a dispute, among christians, respecting the indispensable obligation of christian obedience. Yet it must be acknowledged that some difference of opinion seems to exist, as to the best method of promoting holiness. It is sometimes thought, that the *doctrinal* part of our religion is of, *comparatively*, small importance, to a christian audience; and that what is *practical* might, with more profit, be insisted upon. And yet, methinks, the conduct of the apostle forms a strong argument against the propriety of such a practice. While he uniformly inculcated the discharge of every civil and religious duty, he still connected these duties with the doctrines of grace, as effects with their cause. He believed that, by “making the tree good, the fruit would also be good,”—that, if he could convince his hearers of the necessity of repentance, they would cease to continue in sin;—and, if he could persuade them of the expediency of an atonement, in order to reconcile them to
offended

offended justice, they would be equally convinced of the malignity of their offences, and the necessity of holiness. Hence, he builds the superstructure of christian morality upon the deep and firm basis of *repentance* and *faith*. It was with these weapons (if we may change the metaphor) that he attacked the prejudices of the Jews, and the pride of the Greeks; with these, he combated the self-righteousness of the pharisee, and the learning of the philosopher,—the hatred of his countrymen, and the fury of the Gentiles; and with what success is universally known. Superstition and bigotry, philosophy and power in vain erected their standards against them. Whenever they were wielded, their effects were astonishing. Thousands of every tongue and clime, acknowledged themselves unable to withstand their force; and, deserting the profane altars, and impure rites of their false gods, they acknowledged him as their Supreme Governor, as Lord of All,
who

who had been executed, at Jerusalem, as a malefactor.

Such was the influence of the doctrines of repentance and faith, when they were first preached;—and such, in a good degree, have been their effects ever since, when not adulterated by human mixtures—when not enfeebled by philosophical refinements. May these weapons, of tried excellence, never be abandoned by the christian soldier, till “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!”

When we contrast the humiliating doctrines of Faith and Repentance, with the natural pride and self-sufficiency of the human heart, we cease to wonder that St. Paul considered his office, as a minister of Christ, as exposing him to many *difficulties*. If the scriptural declaration be true, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” we need not be surprised that

that the message of reconciliation met with contempt, and that the ambassadors of peace were cruelly treated and persecuted. St. Paul well understood the principles of human nature, and therefore he was fully prepared for every kind of injury, in the conscientious discharge of his apostolic office. When he became a preacher of that gospel which, before, he had violently opposed, he relinquished his hopes of ease, honor, and emolument; and exposed himself to the contempt of the learned, the hatred of the bigoted, and the cruelty of the powerful. He looked upon his ministry as a warfare, in which he had daily to contend with fresh trials and afflictions; or as a "course," which demanded painful and incessant exertion, if he hoped to obtain the crown.

That he met with no common share of difficulties, and combated them with no ordinary portion of fortitude and patience, is abundantly evident from the history of

his travels. Indeed, he considered the *nature* of his office as exposing him so directly to hardships, of the most painful kind, that he never expected exemption from them, till he should "lay down the earthly garment of this mortality." With respect to the future appointments of providence, he confesses himself ignorant, except "of this one thing that the Holy Ghost witnessed in every city that bonds and imprisonments awaited him."

Now, if this opposition originated—as it is presumed it did—not chiefly in local or temporary circumstances, but in the inveterate enmity of "the carnal mind" against the holy nature of the gospel, whenever the same message, that St. Paul delivered, is published by the ministers of religion, something of the same spirit will again discover itself. It may, indeed, be differently modified, and manifest itself with less malignancy; but still it exists; and will, on different occasions, cause the faithful ambassador

ambassador of Jesus Christ much distress and difficulty. Men feel the same reluctance now which they formerly did, to “come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprovèd:” and when that “word of God, which is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and is a discernèr of the thoughts,” discovers to them the latent wickedness of the human heart, and lays the pride of man in the dust, it is more than probable that they will manifest strong signs of disapprobation,

Hence, it requires, even now, no common share of fortitude to step forward as the advocate of the grand peculiarities of the gospel. We may escape censure, and even obtain applause, while we expatiate upon duties in which many honest heathens excelled;—but when the foundation of christian obedience is laid in deep and unfeigned repentance—when it is main-
D 2
tained

tained that, "without faith" in Jesus Christ, "it is impossible to please God"—that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble"—that mortification, self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness are as much a part of the christian's character, as justice, temperance, and charity—that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God;"—when these and other doctrines, which are of the essence of christianity, are constantly and strenuously insisted upon, it is much more than ought to be expected, if they do not excite the resentment of the pharisaical professor, and the virulence of the abandoned.

We do not, therefore, form a wrong estimate of the duties of our profession, when we conceive of them as exposing us to some degree of obloquy and persecution. Unless we divest the gospel of every thing that distinguishes it from a mere system of ethics, or accommodate its doctrines

trines to the caprice of fashion and the prejudices of the times, it will still be to some "a stumbling-block," and to others "foolishness,"—it will still be "every where spoken against," and, in many instances, it is to be feared, violently opposed. The nearer we approach, in zeal and purity of doctrine, to the standard before us, the greater is the probability that we shall meet with a share of the apostles' trials and persecutions. But still, as "faithful stewards of the mysteries of God," we shall not shrink from danger,—but even "glory in tribulation," when brought upon us in so honourable, so glorious a cause!

While St. Paul beheld the difficulties to which his ministry exposed him, he also took into his estimate the abundant *comfort and support* which he might expect, while found in the conscientious discharge of its duties. Hence, far from being intimidated by the "bonds and imprisonments" which every where awaited him,
he

he triumphantly exclaims, "but none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." He had "not followed a cunningly devised fable," when he made known "the mysteries of the gospel," but was well assured of the truth, as well as deeply convinced of the excellence, of those doctrines, for which he had surrendered every earthly prospect, and exposed himself to the most cruel persecutions. He had examined the principles of the gospel, and found them capable of supporting his hopes;—he had tried the truth of the divine promises, and was never disappointed;—in the hour of difficulty, he had sought for divine assistance, and was never refused. In addition to this, "the hope of his high calling in Christ Jesus"—"the glory that shall be hereafter revealed," "and the inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," animated him under every trial, and gladdened his heart, when labouring under the heaviest pressure.

fure. Hence, " he did not stagger at the
 promises, through unbelief; but, " being
 mighty in faith," he never trembled at
 danger—never shrunk from difficulty—
 never yielded in the combat—never failed
 to conquer. Like a veteran, who had
 often entered the field at manifest disad-
 vantage, but who had known nothing but
 victory,—he advanced, with redoubled
 ardour, to every fresh combat; and still
 found, that no weapon could injure him,
 while armed with the divine panoply—no
 power could withstand him, while wielding
 " the sword of the spirit." Hence, he
 exults, " In all things we are more than
 conquerors." All his desire was to be
 found still maintaining the contest, and
 like a true soldier of Jesus Christ, he wished
 for no higher honour than to fall in the
 field of combat. Ah! what an example
 of christian fortitude—of exalted virtue—
 of heavenly zeal!—Where, ah! where
 shall we find a resemblance of this great
 apostle! Is it in the same cause—for the
 same

crown of glory—under the same Master that we are contending? We might almost deny that this is the case, when we contrast our inactivity, with his zeal—our timidity, with his fortitude—our love of ease, with his incessant toil—our faint efforts, with his unwearied exertion—our frequent defeats, with his uniform victory. Does this want of resemblance originate in a deficiency of motives on our side, or inferior supports, or less glorious prospects? This cannot be pleaded. Can we want *motives*, so long as we are redeemed by the same Saviour, and sanctified by the same Spirit? so long as we have the full possession of those christian privileges, which he laboured to procure, and the inestimable value of which, we have again and again experienced? Can we want *assistance* in the arduous combat, so long as we have the immutable promise, “Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world?” Can we want *prospects*, while “the blessed hope of immortal life” is held forth

forth as the reward of victory? Nothing, alas! can we allege as an excuse for our comparative supineness;—no reason can we assign that will not reflect dishonour upon ourselves! May “the Father of Mercies” pour upon us “a double portion of his spirit;” and enable us, like this champion “for the King of kings, and Lord of lords,” to “go forth unto victory,” till every enemy submit to the authority of Jesus, and “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ!”

As an inference from what has been advanced, we may observe, that *The joyfulness with which the apostles of Christ exposed themselves to suffering and death, in the discharge of their duty, is a decided testimony in favour of the excellence of christianity.* Among the various arguments which have been successfully urged in support of our religion, the manner in which its first advocates sealed their testimony

E

timony

timony has no inconsiderable place. It has been contended that it is contrary to every principle of human conduct, to suppose that a number of men should conspire, without any conceivable motive, to fabricate accounts of an individual, the most extraordinary, and, if untrue, the most absurd, that human folly ever devised; and so obstinately to persist in their testimony, as rather to die, under the most cruel tortures, than to retract the least part of it. While the *fact* that the disciples of Jesus Christ did suffer death, in attestation of what they professed to see and hear, forms an argument for the *truth* of christianity, which has not been, and probably never will be, answered—the *manner* in which they suffered death, affords an argument equally convincing of its incomparable *excellence*.

The questions, “ Why am I obliged to regulate my conduct by the maxims and precepts of philosophers? And what sufficient

ficient motives can be exhibited to induce me to persevere in the path of strict integrity, when that perseverance would expose me to the greatest temporal calamities?" it is presumed were never satisfactorily answered, till "life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel." For want of an authority, superior to that of man, to sanction those duties which evidently arise from the nature and fitnesses of things, the most excellent systems of ethics became a dead letter : and because there was no *certainty* of a future state of retribution, when the quality of every man's actions would be accurately investigated, and rewards and punishments accordingly distributed, few were found possessed of sufficient fortitude to follow virtue through the rough, and sometimes fatal paths, in which she offered to lead her votaries. When a man's views terminate with the present life, and he knows of no enjoyment higher than this world is capable of affording, it is highly im-

probable that he should make any great sacrifices in order to maintain a pure conscience. Just so much of moral honesty and propriety, as should be deemed necessary to support appearances, and promote present advantage—and with the majority a very small proportion of these virtues would be thought sufficient—would satisfy every man. Hence, there could be no fixed moral principles of general, practical application;—but every one would conduct himself in such a manner as he thought most likely to procure him the largest portion of earthly good. Under these circumstances, it is easy to see, if duty and present advantage should come in competition, which would have the preference. The few solitary instances which are recorded, with so much triumph, in the long history of pagan darkness, of persons encountering danger for the sake of maintaining an upright conscience, are a lamentable proof of the truth of this reflection.

But

But, since the light of christianity has been diffused, thousands, in all ages, have been found—and these too of the common class of mankind—who have “ joyfully taken the spoiling of their goods,” and willingly offered themselves to the fury of their enemies, for the sake of “ maintaining a conscience void of offence towards God and man.” Now if christianity offer motives to the performance of moral duties, sufficient to counterbalance every temporal consideration; and not only to divest death of its terrors, but to make it an object of triumph, when it cannot be avoided without sacrificing principle—it must be allowed to be incomparably preferable to every former system. Every real christian must necessarily become a good member of society. He will neither be tempted to conceal his principles, when the profession of them would expose him to difficulty; nor induced to renounce them, when they cannot be retained without surrendering his life. Let it then be granted

granted that the morality of the gospel is as pure as any other system, and it must also be conceded, that the christian religion, considered merely in reference to its motives, is greatly superior to every other. But if, in addition to this, it defies all competition, in the purity of its precepts, as well as in the energy of its sanctions—if, while it more powerfully stimulates to action, it gives an infinitely better direction and bias to the mind—its salutary influence on the state of society must be incalculably greater than that of any other. And yet, in these “times of rebuke and blasphemy,” many have, unblushingly, avowed themselves the irreconcilable enemies of the everlasting gospel, under the pretence that its influence is injurious to society! And, in order to remedy the evils of which they complain, they offer to conduct us into the dark and dismal regions of Atheism! Infatuated men! while you endeavour to obliterate every idea of a Supreme Being and a future state—while you labour to

demolish

demolish the foundation of our hopes, and to throw a gloom over our immortal prospects—you are unloosing the bonds of society, robbing us of our dearest comforts, and rendering human life a state of blackness, horror and despair!

But it is not difficult to account for the conduct of these infuriated beings. The kingdoms of light and darkness, order and confusion, cannot exist together.—Christianity impedes the progress of the lawless and vagrant passions;—it raises an insuperable barrier against the turbulent spirit of innovation;—it makes an invincible stand against anarchy, proscription, and massacre. Hence, it is no wonder that licentiousness and ferocity, aided by atheism and blasphemy, should combine their forces to dethrone the everlasting God, and to lay his kingdom in ruins! But “he that sitteth in the heavens laugheth them to scorn.” “He has established his throne in righteousness,” and
“the

“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!” For reasons which we cannot fathom, he may suffer his enemies, for a season, to triumph; and short-sighted mortals may tremble for “the ark”—but their fears are groundless. When the Almighty “taketh to himself his great power,” he “will break them to pieces, like a potter’s vessel;” and “the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.” “The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of that wrath will he restrain.”

In the meantime, the path of every christian is plainly marked out. We are not ignorant to what causes the ameliorated state of mankind is to be attributed: and while we compare the records of christianity with those of paganism, we cannot but congratulate ourselves that we have seen “the days of the Son of man.” Let us, therefore, with manly boldness, step forwards, as the advocates of the despised gospel. So far from being “ashamed of the

the cross," and the " weapons of our warfare," upon which the pride of philosophism affects to pour such sovereign contempt, let it be our glory to take up the one, and to wield the other. Knowing that, though " the preaching of the cross was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet it was " the power of God unto salvation, unto all that believed," let it be our highest ambition to " preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And though the doctrines of faith and repentance should seem as unequal to the overthrow of atheism, and the stemming of profligacy, as " the sounding of the ram's horns," to the destruction of the walls of Jericho, yet we have seen the invincible efficacy of both, when aided by the arm of Omnipotence. He who " hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise,—and the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, and things

which are not, to bring to nought things that are," and who hath committed the preaching of the gospel "to earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of him," will crown his own word with abundant success. He will either use us as instruments to arrest the rapid progress of infidelity, with all its destructive attendants;—or, having quitted ourselves like men, in the best of services, he will count us worthy to be partakers of his heavenly kingdom—where the difficulties of our combat will be forgotten in the glories of our triumph, and where we shall enjoy the eternal vision and fruition of our God.



7 DE65

Published by the same Author,

AN ESSAY;

TENDING TO SHEW,

“The GROUNDS contained in SCRIPTURE
“ for expecting a future RESTORATION
“ of the JEWS.”

Published in pursuance of the Will of the late Mr.
NORRIS; as having gained the annual Prize for
the year 1796, instituted by him in the University of
Cambridge.

The Author also Boards and Educates EIGHT YOUNG
GENTLEMEN, at Fifty Guineas a Year, and Five
Guineas admission.

WHITE, WISBECH.

Published by the James Knicker

AN ESSAY;

ENDING TO SHOW

The GROUNDS contained in SCRIPTURE
for expecting a future RESTORATION
of the JEWS.

Published in pursuance of the Will of the late Mr.
NORRIS; as having gained the annual Prize for
the year 1790, instituted by him in the University of
Cambridge.

The Author also Reads and Exercises EIGHT YOUNG
GENTLEMEN, at Fifty Guineas a Year, and five
Guineas admission.

Printed, WILKINSON